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SUBJECT: GOOD SECURITY ALLOWS PANJSHIR TO DEVELOP SUSTAINABLE ENERGY

¶1. Summary. Panjshir province has become a model for "clean" energy, with virtually 100 percent of electricity coming from renewable sources. Recent projects include Afghanistan's first wind farm providing power for the provincial government center, multiple micro hydro-electric systems, and solar-powered health clinics. Panjshir's unique security environment allows such energy projects to be built and sustained, free from interference or sabotage. Additionally, these clean energy projects will allow Panjshir to maintain its relatively pristine environment - a key element in the province being able to develop its tourism potential when Afghanistan's overall security situation improves in the future.

POWERING THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT

¶2. First Vice President Ahmed Zia Massoud inaugurated Afghanistan's first power-generating wind farm on November 13. The wind farm project, funded by the Panjshir PRT at a cost of USD 977,000, has a capacity of 30 kw of electricity, expandable to 100 kw. The ten turbines of the wind farm serve as the primary power source for the new provincial government complex.

¶3. Providing power on a consistent basis to the government complex, the wind farm has enabled the governor's staff and key ministry personnel to be co-located which significantly improved coordination among provincial officials. Prior to transferring to the compound, officials were scattered throughout the province and were often operating in facilities that were inadequate at best.

A LEADER IN SUSTAINABLE ENERGY

¶4. The wind farm is only the latest example of the application of renewable energy technology in the Panjshir Valley. Approximately 25 percent of the province's population has access to electricity -- virtually all of it from renewable sources. Lacking a provincial power grid, and given Panjshir's rugged mountainous terrain, the valley presents an ideal setting for decentralized, renewable energy projects. Additionally, Panjshir is endowed with all the right ingredients for "green" energy -- swift-running rivers, ample sunshine, and, near-constant wind at higher elevations.

¶5. In addition to the wind farm, the province has 27 PRT funded "micro hydro-electric" projects either completed or in process. A single micro hydro-electric system can provide electricity for approximately 500 people, enough to power most of Panjshir's

villages while having little effect on the river's flow. The province is also considering the feasibility of a significantly larger power-generating dam project in the valley. Such a project, if built, could potentially power not only most of Panjshir, but also areas beyond the valley.

¶6. Additionally, solar power is playing an increasingly important role in the electricity mix of the valley. Solar-panels on health clinics throughout Panjshir will power water purification systems. The water purifiers will not only provide clean water for the clinics, but also for surrounding villagers, helping address the problem of water-borne illnesses in the province.

¶7. While green electricity is becoming increasingly important in Panjshir, Panjshiris must still rely on traditional fuels for heating, including wood and dried animal dung. As trees are already a scarce resource in the rocky gorges of the valley, fast-growing, high-altitude "hybrid Poplar" trees that provide a ready source of firewood and building material are being considered as a potential project for the province.

SECURITY MAKES IT WORK

¶8. Projects such as the Panjshir wind farm are relatively expensive and vulnerable to sabotage. While not suitable in all areas of Afghanistan, they work in Panjshir because of the secure environment, free from Taliban or other insurgent activity. Such projects serve as a powerful and highly visible demonstration of what is possible when security is present. First Vice President Massoud, brother of the late Ahmed Shah Massoud -- the legendary "Lion of Panjshir," noted in his remarks at the wind farm opening

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that "Security will always be a concern for anything we develop in this country...but Panjshir's geographical location and well-established security made this province a good choice to usher in the development we hope to bring to our country."

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